



## Professor Aaron Gitler Receives the Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship 2017

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**Frankfurt, November 8, 2017—The geneticist Aaron Gitler has been appointed to the 2017 Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship. The professor for genetics at Stanford University, California, researches the causes of neurodegenerative diseases such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, and amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) and develops promising therapeutic approaches. This year, Merz is funding the guest professorship in the fields of medicine and pharmacy for the 27th time.**

The Merz Guest Professorship, first awarded in 1987, is one of the oldest chairs for visiting professors at Frankfurt’s Goethe University. “With the guest professorship, we want to contribute to the exchange of ideas between science and business,” explains Philip Burchard, CEO of Merz. “The risk of illness increases with advanced age. If we are able to develop prevention strategies and therapies to effectively push back against serious diseases, we can achieve the best possible health in old age and improve the quality of life. With his research, Aaron Gitler provides an important impetus for this. We at Merz are also strongly committed to improving patients’ quality of life.”

Misfolded proteins as part of protein biosynthesis are the cause for many neurodegenerative diseases. Inside or outside of cells, they either lead to toxic plaques or to a loss of function. This results in so-called proteopathies such as Alzheimer’s, Parkinson’s, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), a chronic degenerative disease which paralyzes the skeletal muscles. All these diseases are currently incurable.

Together with Professor Georg Auburger from the Goethe University in Frankfurt and other scientists, the team led by Professor Aaron Gitler managed to halt the course of a disease causing progressive paralysis for over a year in an experiment with mice. Without treatment, the animals die after 24 days. This sensational study, published in April of 2017 in the renowned scientific journal “Nature”, will be discussed by experts at a **symposium on Wednesday, November 22**, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. in the auditorium building of the University Hospital Frankfurt (building 22, auditorium 2).



In Germany, initial therapy trials have begun at the University Hospital Ulm (Director: Professor Albert Ludolph) which treat amyotrophic lateral sclerosis with the injection of specially designed ribonucleic acid (RNA). Professor Jochen Weishaupt from this department will report on the ALS work in Ulm at the symposium. Similarly, Professor Felix Rosenow from the Goethe University recently proved that the injection of RNA is also an interesting option in epilepsy treatment.

At the **public forum on Thursday, November 23**, citizens will have the chance to discuss these topics with Professors Gitler, Auburger, and Rosenow from 4.30 p.m. to 6 p.m. The overarching theme of the forum, which will take place in the Arkadensaal of the Goethe House (Grosser Hirschgraben 23-25 in Frankfurt), is the following: "Injections against Alzheimer's and other diseases? New therapies to treat age-related brain damage". The event will be moderated by Professor Manfred Schubert-Zsilavec, Vice President of the Goethe University.

#### **The Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship**

The Friedrich Merz Guest Professorship was founded in December 1985 in honor of the 100th birthday of the Merz company founder, Friedrich Merz, who, as one of the first members of the Senckenbergische Gesellschaft, had close ties with the University of Frankfurt and was a patron of science. The purpose of the guest professorship is to invite a highly respected scientist from the field of pharmaceuticals or human medicine to work at the University of Frankfurt each year. Awarded for the first time in 1987, it has been awarded every year since then, with just two exceptions. Alongside the symposium, which presents a spectrum of topics ranging from basic research to health care research, the guest professorship offers researchers from both the academic world and the industry the opportunity to participate in an annual exchange of knowledge and to build a foundation for further collaboration in the future.

#### **Merz Pharma Group**

With approximately 3,000 employees and 34 subsidiaries worldwide, Merz is a global leader in Aesthetics and Neurotoxins. Privately held for more than 100 years, the company is distinguished by its in-house research and development, solid financial strength and continuous growth. Complementing its unique portfolio of products for minimally invasive and non-invasive skin rejuvenation and tightening, Merz also develops neurotoxin therapy for the treatment of movement disorders. Skincare products and a range of OTC medicines are also included in offerings from the company, which is headquartered in Frankfurt, Germany. In

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